

“Every Man a King”-- Huey P. Long (February 23, 1934)

Added to the National Registry: 2003

Essay by Christopher Sterling (guest post)*



Huey P. Long (1893-1935) was serving as a U.S. Senator when he gave this radio address. A consummate political animal, he innately understood how radio could spread his message of social protest.

Louisiana was Long's birthplace and political base. Initially home-schooled (he was one of nine children), he was soon a successful attorney. He began his political climb in 1918 with election to what would soon become the state Public Service Commission, becoming its chair in 1922. Six years later, Long achieved his first pinnacle of power when he was elected governor in a runoff election. His populist platform spoke for the little people as opposed to the long dominant oil industry or old plantation elite. After defeating an attempt to impeach him, and following years of little state economic development, Long pioneered a state-wide road building and public works movement that improved infrastructure while putting people to work. He poured funds into both public health and education, helping to shift the state up from the bottom of the national scale.

How he accomplished all this quickly attracted attention. Dubbed the “Kingfish,” Long's methods cut corners and eliminated dissent as he developed a strong political machine that dominated every aspect of life in Louisiana. More than a few critics dubbed him a dictator with his widespread power of appointment and control of politics on all levels. He took his methods to the national stage when he entered the Senate in 1932 (having actually won the seat in the 1930 election, but deciding to serve out his gubernatorial term), leaving behind a crony to run the statehouse. A harsh critic of President Hoover, he supported Franklin Roosevelt for the presidency in 1932.

Less than a year into Roosevelt's first term, however, Long had become one of the President's most strident political enemies, arguing that the New Deal didn't go far or fast enough. In 1934, the Senator began to build a national organization (the Share Our Wealth Society with “Every Man a King” as its motto) to help him run for the presidency in his own right in 1936. His populist (and widely popular) program promoted economic

